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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KYIV 002115

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SUBJECT: FALL OF YATSENYUK LETS TYMOSHENKO FOCUS ON
YANUKOVYCH

REF: A. A) KYIV 1727

B. B) KYIV 437

Classified By: Political Counselor Colin Cleary for reasons 1.4 (b) & (d).

Summary

1. (C) Political observers, rival campaigns and internal advisers of Front of Change head Arseniy Yatsenyuk agree he has no hope of progressing to the second round of the January/February 2010 presidential election. Once considered by many disenchanted voters as the new western-leaning reform-minded candidate to support, Yatsenyuk's selection of Russian campaign consultants with ties to Party of Regions head Viktor Yanukovych's 2004 presidential campaign is noted by all as a fatal mistake. His fall allows Tymoshenko to focus on the daunting task of closing the gap with front-runner Yanukovych. End Summary.

Disappointment and Disillusion

2. (C) Yatsenyuk's Foreign Policy advisor, Olexander Shcherba, confided to us on December 1 that the Front of Change head and former Parliament (Rada) Speaker's campaign is falling apart after its impressive late spring/early summer launch. Disappointment and disillusion have overtaken the majority of his local campaign team. Shcherba told us that Yatsenyuk's announcement at Front of Change's November 28 party congress that he will not seek the Prime Ministership dashed hopes staffers had of finding jobs in the next government. Many are already looking for other options.

Russian Advisors Rule

3. (C) Shcherba characterized Yatsenyuk the candidate as stubborn and difficult to advise. "He believes he already knows everything and does not listen to us." One group he does listen to, however, is his Russian campaign consultants (ref A). According to Tymoshenko Bloc (BYuT) MP Andriy Shevchenko, this team came onto the scene and quickly alienated the campaign's base of grassroots volunteers. The Russian team is led by Vladimir Granovskiy, who, analysts tell us, worked under Party of Regions MP Andriy Klyuyev on Yanukovych's team in 2004. Shcherba blamed the Russians for the campaign's failure, saying that they mistakenly believed that the unorthodox style, colors and messages of the campaign would appeal to Ukrainians. He stopped short, though, of agreeing with a rumor that the Granovskiy team was planted by the Kremlin to specifically sabotage Yatsenyuk.

4. (C) Yatsenyuk polled well in the summer and seemed a viable challenger to Tymoshenko for second place and entry into the second round against Yanukovych. However, PENTA political analyst Volodymyr Fesenko told us the Russian advisors appealed to his ego and got him to buy into their

strategy. Fesenko said this move had destroyed Yatsenyuk's chances. Yatsenyuk changed teams, changed messages, and seemed to retreat into his "own little world." The Russians convinced Yatsenuk, previously known as a pro-Western liberal and Yushchenko protege, to advocate an amorphous "Greater Europe" concept, with Ukraine at its core, rejecting NATO and the EU as unachievable for Ukraine.

Mistakes Were Mostly Yatsenyuk's

15. (C) Fesenko contended that attacks from other candidates and political figures, such as the statements and poster campaign backed by the mayor of Uzhhorod that Yatsenyuk was of Jewish decent, lowered Yatsenyuk's support in the polls. He countered, however, that most of the damage was done by the candidate himself. He turned eastward instead of strengthening his traditional base of support in the west. Yatsenyuk's shift to the east cost him his base of support in the west, which was comprised of disenchanted voters who looked to him as a western-minded alternative to the disappointing President Yushchenko and PM Tymoshenko. Shevchenko disagreed that the "Jewish" message hurt Yatsenyuk, but said it was an outside factor he could point to when trying to focus the blame away from himself. "Arseniy is arrogant and ambitious and does not consider criticism when making his decisions. Arseniy destroyed his own chances."

16. (C) Western NGO representatives told us that when he was shopping for campaign consultants, Yatsenyuk originally came to them asking for the "silver bullet" that would get him

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elected. When told it would take tremendous effort and hard work, he turned to the Russians, who appealed to his ego but eroded his niche as the new western-leaning reform-minded candidate.

Coulda Been a Contender

17. (C) The result of these machinations is that Yatsenyuk has lost realistic hope of reaching the second round of the election, observers believe. Fesenko said that Yatsenyuk had dropped from 12-14% support in June to about 6-7% now. This causes the Tymoshenko campaign to breathe a little easier, Shevchenko told us, as it means they have cinched the Prime Minister's advancement to the second round. "We saw him as a real threat this summer, when he was polling high. Our tactics worked somewhat to take support away from Arseniy, but he honestly did most of our work for us," Shevchenko added. With Yatsenyuk's declaration that he has no interest in becoming PM, many wonder how influential a politician he will even be after the presidential election. Shcherba told us Yatsenyuk is currently working on fine-tuning his ideology (something, we noted, most candidates try to do before they launch their campaign) and on building the Front of Change party's regional base to focus on the (as yet unscheduled) parliamentary elections.

Third-Place Feeding Frenzy

18. (C) Yatsenyuk's free-fall has left up for grabs the suddenly coveted third place in the first round of elections: trailing far behind the two front-runners, there are four or five candidates who hope to secure the most votes among the also-rans, and use a third-place finish as a springboard for their parties in the future elections, or even for a run at the PM job. Fesenko echoed earlier rumors that Yushchenko is now intent on winning third place in order to position the Our Ukraine party for a stronger showing in the next parliamentary elections.

Comment: Peaking Too Soon

19. (C) Yatsenyuk's is a classic case of peaking too soon. Disillusionment of his supporters, like Shcherba, has increased since November. Yatsenyuk's plans for the final weeks of the campaign reflect his campaign's confusion: instead of reaching out to voters in the west to recoup his base, he will spend this time in the Russia-friendly Luhansk and Donetsk regions.
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